

Turkish prosecutors indict Syrian rebels for seeking chemical weapons

By [RT](#)

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A court indictment by the Turkish prosecutors into the alleged use of chemical weapons by the Syrian rebels has once again highlighted fears this week that sarin toxic gas was used by the opposition and not the Assad government.

The prosecutor in the Turkish city of Adana has issued a 132-page indictment, alleging that six men of the al-Qaeda-linked al-Nusra Front and Ahrar ash-Sham tried to seek out chemicals with the intent to produce the nerve agent, sarin gas, a number of Turkish publications reported.

The main suspect in the case, 35-year-old Syrian-national Hytham Qassap has been charged with *“being a member of a terrorist organization”* and *“attempting to acquire weapons for a terrorist organization.”* The other 5, all Turkish nationals are being charged with *“attempting to acquire weapons for a terrorist organization.”*

The indictment alleges that Qassap tried to setup a network in Turkey in order to obtain chemical materials for the al-Nusra Front and Ahrar al-Sham Brigades. Citing telephone calls made by the cell, the prosecution believes that the group ordered at least ten tons of chemicals, Al-Alam News Network reports.

The prosecution also dismissed claims that the suspects were unaware of their wrong doing. *“The claim that the suspects didn’t know about the possibility of producing sarin nerve gas from the chemicals they tried to buy is not true which was established when they were testifying,”* the document reads.

Meanwhile all six suspects have pleaded not guilty. *“The suspects have pleaded not guilty saying that they had not been aware the materials they had tried to obtain could have been used to make sarin gas. Suspects have been consistently providing conflicting and incoherent facts on this matter,”* the indictment said.

If convicted, Qassab faces a 25 year prison sentence, while his accomplices face 15 years prison terms.

The six men were a part of a group of 11 people [arrested in their safe house in Adana](#) on May 23, 2013. Their apprehension came about after surveillance by Turkish police who’d received a tip that Syrian jihadists were trying to acquire two government-regulated military-grade chemical substances. Five of the detained were released from custody after questioning, background checks and after lab tests proved that chemicals seized during the

arrest were not sarin gas.

The international community has long been ignoring worrying reports that the rebel fighters in Syria might be capable of carrying out a chemical attack. Russian President, Vladimir Putin also reiterated this week that while no one doubts that poison gas was indeed used in Syria, there is *“every reason to believe it was used not by the Syrian Army, but by opposition forces, to provoke intervention by their powerful foreign patrons.”*

Evidence that chemical weapons were used by the opposition was also highlighted by the [two European hostages](#) that were freed from Syrian rebel captivity last Sunday. In a phone conversation overheard by hostage Pierre Piccinin da Prata, he said it was clear the rebels used gas on civilians in an August 21 attack near Damascus.

“I don’t think that Bashar Al-Assad and the Syrian government are to blame for the chemical attack in Al-Ghouta,” [Piccinin told RT](#). “It would have been absurd for the Syrian government to use chemical weapons.”

The Syrian government has always rejected any accusations of using chemical weapons. After one of the first alleged incidents in Aleppo in March, it was the government that called on UN to send in chemical experts. Another alleged chemical weapons use was reported in Homs in December 2012.

Russian experts flew out to the site of the attack in March to collect samples from the incident. On 9 July 2013, Moscow submitted the [results of its inquiry](#) into the use of chemical weapons at Aleppo to the United Nations. Russian scientists analyzing the 19 March 2013 attack found that it was most likely [launched by opposition forces](#), and not the Syrian government.

“It was determined that on March 19 the rebels fired an unguided missile Bashair-3 at the town of Khan al-Assal, which has been under government control. The results of the analysis clearly show that the shell used in Khan al-Assal was not factory made and that it contained sarin,” UN envoy Vitaly Churkin has said.

The United Nations independent commission of inquiry on Syria into the attack in March concluded that no evidence of the use of sarin by Syria’s government troops has so far been uncovered. The lead investigator, Carla Del Ponte, did hint that it was the [rebels that most likely used the chemical weapons](#).

“The Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic wishes to clarify that it has not reached conclusive findings as to the use of chemical weapons in Syria by any parties to the conflict. As a result, the Commission is not in a position to further comment on the allegations at this time,” the statement read.

Meanwhile, the UN chemical weapons inspection team has completed the report on the latest chemical attack in Syria on August 21 and will deliver it to UN Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon over the weekend.

“I believe that the report will be an overwhelming report that chemical weapons (were) used, even though I cannot publicly say at this time before I receive this report,” Moon said.

Although the team was not authorized to draw any conclusions on who was the perpetrator of the attack, a number of US officials speaking to the media on condition of anonymity over the last couple of days indicated that the report would hint the Assad government was responsible.

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